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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR SPEAKS AT INAUGURAL MEETING OF  
PARLIAMENT'S BORDER CAUCUS

1. (U) Summary: Ambassador Cellucci addressed the first meeting of Parliament's new Border Caucus on February 8, 2005. The Ambassador affirmed our determination to keep the border functioning, while sounding a note of caution about the potential effects of marijuana liberalization in Canada and discouraging visions of a "borderless" North America. He offered the Mission's help in establishing contacts between Members of Parliament in the Border Caucus and their counterparts in the United States Congress. End summary.

2. (U) On February 8 Ambassador Cellucci spoke at the founding meeting of Parliament's Border Caucus, a group of 37 Members of Parliament whose ridings are adjacent to the U.S. border. Caucus members had decided late last year to meet periodically to consolidate issues and share ideas regarding improved management of the border to facilitate trade and tourism in both directions. The formation of this multiparty group was the inspiration of Russ Hiebert, Conservative MP from British Columbia. In addition to Hiebert, there are three other co-chairs: Claude Banchand (Bloc, Quebec), Roger Gallaway (Liberal, Ontario), and Brian Masse (NDP, Ontario).

3. (U) The Ambassador congratulated the MPs on taking the initiative to form a border caucus and pledged that the Embassy would do what it could to assist the caucus' efforts. He recounted that for the past three-and-one-half years the Embassy's focus has been on keeping the border open for trade and closed to terrorists. The Ambassador noted that much progress had been made in speeding the passage of legitimate goods and travelers, particularly with programs like FAST and NEXUS, but that more needs to be done to increase capacity and unlock bottlenecks.

4. (U) During a 15-minute question session, the Ambassador was asked if he foresaw a day when Canada and the United States would be able to do what Europe has done and eliminate the border. The border will remain, the Ambassador replied, but by advancing the process of integration we could create a de facto "union," particularly if we achieve free trade for individuals (i.e., elimination of customs duties) and labor mobility. Asked what Canada can do to beef up its border security, the Ambassador noted that a great deal has been done by the new Canadian agencies formed in the past few years, and that they are practicing "vigilant cooperation" with their U.S. counterparts. Joint activities like the International Border Enforcement Teams protect our countries' citizens against terrorism as well as crime.

5. (U) In response to a question about Canada's potential decriminalization of marijuana, the Ambassador cautioned that, whatever the reality, such an action could create the perception that marijuana is easy to obtain in Canada. That, in turn, could cause heightened vigilance and inspections at the U.S. border, causing delays and putting pressure on the border at the same time as we are trying to speed things and reduce pressure through the programs of the Smart Border Action Plan.

6. (U) In closing, the Ambassador urged that Border Caucus members make contact with their counterparts in the U.S. Congress and offered the Embassy's help in facilitating these contacts. He suggested as well that they should try to interest more Congressmen in visiting Canada. Border Caucus MPs expressed eagerness to connect with their counterparts in the United States but indicated that they were not exactly sure how to do so. (Comment: Embassy would appreciate any assistance Department could offer on how to better connect the U.S. and Canadian border caucuses. This kind of contact would be helpful in solving problems, setting policies, and directing funding as we seek to continue to promote the free flow of goods and people in the safest and most efficient way possible. End comment.)

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